



Helmut Höritsch

## **Specific Didactics for Handball**

**A concept for teaching the specific playing skills of the sport game of handball**



### **Abstract**

*Based on my professional activities for the European Handball Federation (EHF) in education and training as well as my more than 20 years of work as an external lecturer for handball at the Vienna Institute for Sports Science (ISW) my aim is to present a specific didactic concept for the course on “Learning, practising and learning how to teach sport-game-oriented motor sequences in handball” which is offered as part of the teacher-training curriculum.*

*The article is based on a proposal for handball-specific didactics developed by experts from leading European handball nations. This proposal is clearly inspired by age-appropriate, game-appropriate and action-oriented didactic models and includes cross-references to the current state-of-the-art of teaching concepts for sport games as well as to the Austrian curriculum for the subject “physical exercise and sports”.*

*The implementation of this concept in university-level instruction is based on a 3-level model “Me and the Ball”, “With Each Other”, and “Team Against Team”, which lucidly and by way of examples spans topics ranging from “play and exercise sequences” to the acquisition of general and specific playing skills for the sport game of handball and also includes new trends such as Beach Handball.*

## **1. On the current status of the debate on handball teaching**

### **1.1. The route to handball – The instructional approach of the European Handball Federation (EHF)**

#### **1.1.1. Philosophy**

When starting a ball game with children and young people, one cannot use the adults' game as a basis. The game has to be adapted to be age- and situation-appropriate in terms of organization, physical and behavioural aspects. It is not sufficient to reduce the size of the playing court, the goals, the ball and the number of players. It is much more important to offer children a variety of experiences and suitable content to guide them to the sport of handball by offering fun and enjoyment.

The children's game differs fundamentally from the adults' game. By the end of their initiation process, the children should have developed the skills for the model created by us adults.



Therefore, the path to playing handball must be viewed as a master plan for the subject-specific didactics of handball. It includes recommendations that the National Federations and educational institutions may interpret, adapt and exploit in accordance with their circumstances and facilities. The five levels defined in this plan correspond to different age categories and/or development phases.

### **1.1.2. By children, for children**

Being able to retreat into the background at the right time and refraining from continually interfering with the game – while remaining vigilant – will certainly enable the children to develop on their own more effectively.

To help children to take an increasingly active role, i.e. to become autonomous both as individuals and as a group, one has to enable them to develop independence in the following areas:

a) Preparation and structured organization – in the preparations for the game (getting dressed, setting up and removing the game environment) children should be gradually prepared to attain complete autonomy.

b) Team management – in order to apply the simplified rules (e.g. player substitution) in the game, one player should be given the responsibility of a team manager.

c) Leadership and control during the competition – the simple organizational aspects of a match should be entrusted to the participants, including timekeeping and scorekeeping by means of simple resources such as a timer and a card for the score.

d) Referees – teaching the function of the referee or, rather, the “game leader” should be understood as an integral part of the game. Striking the balance between subjective perception and objective decision are the tasks of the adult, of the “game leader”.

### **1.1.3. Playing**

Normally, children become able to play a game in a group at the ages of 5 or 6. Motivation and patience greatly promote children’s motor and psychological development. Children should experience the game through enjoyable “tries” and



“discovery”. “Play on your own and play with a friend” might be the motto for this age group, with due attention to encouraging the development of group spirit at this stage.

At the age of 7 to 10 the main focus should be on fun, enjoyment and a sense of achievement, with competition playing only a minor role. Results, scores and rankings may induce an improper performance-orientation. It would be desirable to keep the game as non-physical as possible to allow the technical skills to unfold undisturbed. Rules may have an adverse effect on the flow of the game, therefore only the most elementary guidelines should be developed on the basis of concrete situations that may arise during a game. “Play on your own and play against friends” might be the motto at this age – go for experience rather than results!

In practice, mini-handball is by nature almost exclusively a game played for the sake of playing. It is only at the end of this development phase that children start enjoying competitive playing, which is introduced very gradually at Level III.

#### **1.1.4. Competition**

Structuring of the sensitive transition phase from 10 to 12 should be guided by the children's/adolescents' level of performance and development. Therefore, one has to examine very carefully whether the move to 6 + 1 players on the full-scale handball court can already be made or whether alternative forms of training and playing should be offered. Alternative options would include 5 + 1 players on half the playing court or two times 3:3, an option that will be briefly described as it may not be well known yet.

Basic idea of the “2 times 3:3” game:

- ⇒ Two teams of 6 + 1 players.
- ⇒ Standard handball court.
- ⇒ The handball court is divided for each team into an attack half and a defence half.
- ⇒ Each team has three players positioned in each half.
- ⇒ The players are not allowed to cross the middle line.
- ⇒ The game starts when the ball is tossed in by the referee.
- ⇒ There is no throw-in after a goal has been scored but the goalkeeper returns the ball immediately to the game.



⇒ Each player should be deployed as an offensive and defensive player.

⇒ Apart from that, the handball rules apply.

### 1.1.5. “The route to handball” (EHF)

Level	Age	Philosophy	By children for children	Game	Competition	Contents	Requirements and skills
I	up to 7	The ball as a playing companion - getting used to the ball	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Come “and help”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Preparatory games</li> </ul>	NO	<u>Animation:</u> 1. Getting used to the ball 2. Handling the ball 3. Motor coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Basic motor skills</li> <li>● Learning how to fall</li> <li>● Activities and games with the ball: taking up, rolling, passing, catching games</li> </ul>
II	7-10	Mini-handball	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 1 referee from among the players</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 4+1 players</li> <li>● Smaller court</li> <li>● Goals 2.40x1.60m</li> <li>● Ball size 0</li> </ul> Mini-handball playing festivals	NO  YES	<u>Game:</u> 1. Motivation 2. Physical relationship between the player and the court 3. Various experiences 4. Social experiences / playing festivals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Basic motor skills + passing, catching, bouncing, blocking</li> <li>● Moving into free spaces, watching, running loose</li> <li>● Playing elements in motion, distance and position towards the opponent</li> </ul> Cf. EHF publication “ <b>Mini-Handball</b> ”
III	10-12	„Basic Handball 1”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 1 – 2 referees from among the teams</li> <li>● 1 adult helper</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Transition phase to 6+1</li> <li>● Handball court 40x20m</li> <li>● Goals 3.00x2.00m</li> <li>● Ball size 1</li> <li>● Shorter playing time</li> <li>● Alternative playing formats: 5+1 half of the court 2 times 3:3</li> </ul>	YES/ NO	<u>Game / drills:</u> 1. No adult type training 2. Development of technical / tactical skills 3. Development of physical skills 4. Playing festivals and simple competitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Age-appropriate communication and storage of information</li> <li>● Playing in motion – man marking, offensive defence, counter-attack, play on all positions</li> <li>● Versatile use of speed, integrated endurance, strengthening the body using its own weight</li> </ul>
IV	12-14	“Basic Handball 2”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 2 referees from among the teams</li> <li>● 1 adult helper</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 6+1 players</li> <li>● Girls: Ball size 1</li> <li>● Boys: Ball size 2</li> <li>● Shorter playing time</li> </ul>	YES	<u>Drill / game</u>	Cf. EHF publication “ <b>Basic Handball</b> ”
V	14 and above	Handball	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 2 referees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 6+1 players</li> <li>● Girls: Ball size 2</li> <li>● Boys: Ball size 3</li> </ul>	YES	<u>Training / game</u>	Cf. handball-specific training theory

### 1.2. The consequences for teaching the sport

At primary school age (6 – 10 years) the aim is to teach our children general playing skills. At this age group, the aim is to provide a broad fundamental education covering a variety of sports. As an animation tool, mini-handball offers first experiences with the ball, practice in co-ordinative abilities, and an introduction to the social environment of the team sport of handball. Here the motto should be experiences rather than results. The primary aim at this age is the acquisition of motor skills playfully and in varied ways as well as gathering motor experiences in as many sports as possible.



Sport-specific specialization starts at the age in which motor skills are learned most readily (10 – 12 years). The goal is to acquire the basics of various handball techniques and to enhance co-ordinating skills that are closely linked to the acquisition of technical competence. The broad basic education in many sports and game-oriented education is followed by the methods-driven route to the game of handball. To this end, excellent conditions may be created at school. In handball clubs, special care should be taken to expand the teaching of technical and co-ordination skills to other sports as well (track-and-field sports, hit-the-ball games) to avoid the development of only limited capabilities.

The skills that children and adolescents need to play handball are easy to define. To be able to move successfully about the playing court, pupils have to master various techniques such as bouncing, passing and catching the ball, taking shots at the goals and special motor skills. The ability to co-ordinate one's movements is regarded as a prerequisite for acquiring technical competence. Once this competence is well developed, beginners learn new moves faster and more easily. In developing the handball game, the focus is initially on shots at the goal. Defensive moves are introduced only later on, for preventing goals is easier than scoring goals. Handball is a team game, therefore pupils have to learn early on to play together, initially in small groups. As the game always involves two teams playing against each other, individual components of the game have to be adapted to the moves of the opponents. Both teams, of course, have to observe the rules of the game and play fairly to permit a game to be played in the first place.

A number of key points that are important in developing the game of handball should be borne in mind:

- The main focus is on playing the ball and taking shots at the goal.
- A 6:6 game is too demanding for pupils. Pupils develop their playing skills in standard situations that form part of every game (2:1, 3:2). Playing is something that must be learned. With a reduced number of players, beginners are able to cope with the situations that arise during a game.
- Beside the game of handball, it is important to improve co-ordinating abilities to avoid one-sidedness.



- The components that have been learned are always practised in a 4:4 game or 5:5 plus goalkeeper and tested for suitability for the game. They are then improved again in small groups ( 2:1, 3:2).
- Practising offensive defence play in individual training sessions enhances the appropriate response in 1:1 play.
- Passing feints, precision passing, playing without the ball and footwork in attack and defence always have to be part of the drills.

The didactic objectives of an elementary introduction to handball may be summarized as follows:

<b>Technical skills/co-ordination:</b>	<b>Tactics:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bouncing</li><li>• Passing/catching</li><li>• Passing variants</li> <li>• Motor skills</li><li>• Overarm shot</li><li>• Jump throw</li><li>• Starting to run</li><li>• Body feint/breaking through</li><li>• Defence technique</li><li>• Blocking</li><li>• Goalkeeper defence</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Application in 2:1 play</li><li>• Passing the ball while moving</li><li>• Running towards the goal with intention to shoot</li> <li>• Making space</li><li>• Running loose/marking</li><li>• Perception: passing to free player</li> <li>• Man marking</li><li>• Offensive zone defence</li><li>• Each player plays on all positions</li></ul>

<b>Fitness:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Speed: versatile</li><li>• Stamina: no anaerobic training, length takes precedence over intensity (run 1 minute per year of age, endurance method)</li><li>• Strength: dynamic training on and with equipment, strengthening stomach and back muscles</li></ul>



### 1.3. Didactic principles in the “physical exercise and sports” curriculum

The didactic principles of the subject “physical exercise and sports” provide the following with regard to movement sequences:

- a) Development of ability to play and versatile playing skills, to be acquired through spontaneous and creative play in various situation and the continuing development of playing competence with increased attention to technical aspects
- b) Development of awareness of rules as the ability to recognize agreements regarding the game and rules of the game, to change or redesign such rules as the situation requires, and to assume game leadership
- c) Being able to pursue tactical measures, take tactical decisions, and implement measures in the group and in the team.

### 1.4. Teaching sport-specific didactics

For the implementation of the EHF handball education plan, experts of leading European handball nations recommend an overarching master concept for teaching based on an action-oriented didactic model for sports and games that is structured in three levels, as mentioned above. It provides for the acquisition of basic technical skills, but also trains coordinating abilities and promotes the development of general playing skills and social awareness.

Level 1: “Me and the Ball” (“the ball, your playing companion”)  
(carrying, bouncing, rolling throwing balls)

Level 2: “With Each Other” (“me and my playfellow”)  
(bouncing, passing, catching balls, co-operating, hitting)

Level 3: “Against Each Other” (“team against team”)  
(running loose, feinting, defending )

At all three levels, the child-appropriate (e.g. motion history) as well as game-appropriate (systematic development of basic play leading to target play) didactic concept is clearly apparent.

The concept is thus ideally suited for acquiring general playing skills as well as, subsequently, specific skills for the sport game of handball, as the development of



elementary, general skills as well as coordination and cognitive abilities is also of particular importance for the target sport of handball.

Components such as

- a) Moving in space, moving without the ball (peripheral vision, “spacing” – orientation in space, running loose, breaking away, positioning oneself)
- b) Getting used to the ball (taking up the ball, carrying it, putting it down, rolling it)
- c) Basic technical elements (ball control – bouncing/dribbling, passing, catching/accepting, throwing/taking shots)
- d) Basic components of individual and group tactics (“give and go“/ passing – running loose and offering to catch, switching from offensive play to marking and vice versa, feinting, 2 against 1 player, playing together/co-operation, e.g.: double passing, changing position/crossing, screening/blocking, etc.)

should be practised in quickly changing situations, such as adaptation of equipment, number of players, size of court, rule or additional rule (e.g.: when touched by the opponent either a) pass or b) loss of ball, etc.) in playing and practice sessions.

## **2. Perspectives for university-level teaching: illustration by examples**

### **2.1. Programme for university-level course on “Learning, practising, learning to teach sport-game-oriented movement sequences in handball” in teacher training for “physical exercise and sports”**

#### **Brief outline of the course**

The first third of the course is dedicated to the application of general ball-playing skills with special regard to specific components of the target game of HANDBALL. The broad three-level master concept (Level 1 “Me and the Ball”; Level 2 “With Each Other”; Level 3 “Against Each Other”) is based on an action-oriented instructional model using sport-game didactics. Beside the acquisition and practice of technical fundamentals and coordinative abilities, it contributes to the development of tactical





playing modes at the individual, group and team levels in playing and drill sessions held under changing situational conditions.

The remaining two-thirds are dedicated to teaching special playing skills in the target game of HANDBALL, i.e. HANDBALL basics, including technique and coordination (bouncing, passing, catching, passing variants, movement techniques, overarm shot, jump shot, falling jump shot, run-up, body feints, breakthrough, defence techniques, blocking, goalkeeper defence) as well as tactical skills (2:1 situation, passing the ball in motion, running towards the goal intending to take a shot, making space, running loose, marking, man-marking, space-marking).

At the same time, awareness and knowledge of rules are taught as well as general guidelines for educational game teaching. “Beach Handball” is presented in theory and practice as an alternative outdoor variant and trend sport with a structure and philosophy differing from traditional handball.

### **Targets and contents of the course**

The aim of the course is to

- enable students to develop special playing skills in the sport game of HANDBALL, starting from a three-level action-oriented didactic model for sports and games including “Me and the Ball”, “With Each Other” and “Against Each Other” modules as well as the practice of technical and tactical components.
- offer students an opportunity to get to know, by way of examples, key didactic concepts for sports and games as well as methods and didactical approaches for teaching special tactical playing moves at the individual, group and team levels. This should permit the students to teach pupils at different levels of skill in different situational conditions (in terms of space and materials) including the differently structured alternative option of Beach Handball.
- develop among students an adequate ability to demonstrate the basic modes of behaviour in sports and games as well as to train the ability of identifying faulty behaviour and suggesting improvements.

### **Teaching competence**



- Knowledge of key didactic concepts for sports and games as well as methods and didactic approaches for teaching proper handball conduct on the basis of a “minimum set of rules”, awareness of rules, and fair play,
- The ability to provide special education in sports and games matched to different levels of skills and situative conditions,
- Ability to demonstrate basic patterns of conduct in ball games in the target game of HANDBALL, fundamental mastering of key tactics at the individual and group levels.

### **Implementation in university teaching**

- Alternate between practical implementation of didactic concepts for sport-games, specific teaching methods for skills and conduct during the game, and joint reflection on approaches with the students,
- Independent preparation and execution of individual teaching units followed by critical reflection and feedback

### **Combination with other courses**

- Combination with methods, didactics, biomechanics and training theory

### **Examination criteria**

- Regular and active participation
- Taking over/implementing a practice-related topic
- Theoretical review of educational contents

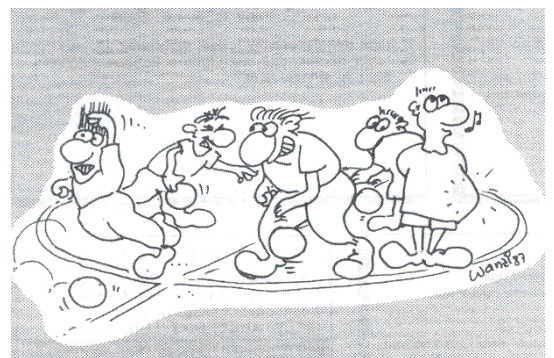
### **Examination dates**

- Tests are taken as an integral part of the course.

## **2.2. Selected examples of contents taught**

### **2.2.1. Practice “dribbling in space”**

Running around and controlling the ball on a defined playing court – spatial orientation





and adapting ball control as direction changes.

### 2.2.2. Playing mode “protect your ball“

**Playing idea** (derived from practice format)

The pupils run and dribble the ball on a defined playing court and try to take away the ball from each other.

#### Variants

- 1) “Stealing the coloured bands” while controlling the ball.
- 2) Catching game with several hunters.

### 2.2.3. Basket handball

#### The idea of the game

Two teams try to score baskets by playing together.

**Development of rules** (without participation of the game leader)

1st phase – free implementation of the idea of the game

2nd phase – debate and agreement with one’s own team on the introduction of rules

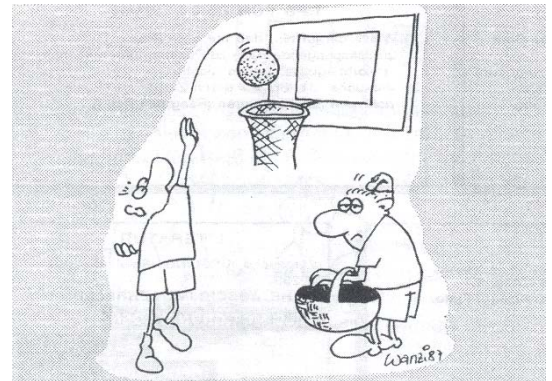
3rd phase – debate and agreement with the other team on the introduction of rules (=playfellows)

#### Variants

- 1) Basket handball with several baskets – two or three baskets on the long side.
- 2) One court on long side, one court on short side; four teams playing at the same time

### 3. References:

- 1) Guerrero, J., Garcia, C., Oppermann, H.P., Nilsson Green, C., Rinck, C., Hjorth, S., Sollberger, H. & Hörtsch, H. (2004). *Minihandball (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*. Wien: European Handball Federation ([www.eurohandball.com](http://www.eurohandball.com))





- 2) Rinck, C., Guerrero, J. (1997). *Der Weg zum Handball*. Wien: European Handball Federation ([www.eurohandball.com](http://www.eurohandball.com))
- 3) Höritsch, H. (2003). *Minihandball. Eine Spiele- & Übungssammlung für Schule und Verein, U9-Turniere und Spielfeste*. Wien: Österreichischer Handball Bund ([www.oehb.at](http://www.oehb.at) or [www.whv-info.at/](http://www.whv-info.at/))

#### 4. The author

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